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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUSHANBE 000781

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SUBJECT: TAJIK SECURITY SERVICES DETAIN NDI'S ACTING DIRECTOR

CLASSIFIED BY: Richard E. Hoagland, Ambassador, EXEC, Embassy
Dushanbe.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Ministry of Interior officers detained National Democratic Institute (NDI) Acting Director Nurul Rahimbekov April 26 as he was attempting to board a domestic flight to Khujand to conduct a training program for political parties. Contacts in the Ministry of Security, which has taken over the case, have made criminal allegations against Rahimbekov, a Kazakhstani citizen, unrelated to his official NDI activities. Although they told Post's Senior Law Enforcement Advisor (SLEA) that Rahimbekov would be released from custody to face charges, as of 16:00 hours April 27 he remains in custody in an unknown location, though likely the Ministry of Security's detention center in Dushanbe. Embassy officers have had no access to him. The heavy-handedness and swiftness of the action against Rahimbekov suggest Ministry of Security officials were looking for an opportunity to catch him in violation of Tajik law in order to remove him from Dushanbe. We cannot totally rule out a set-up. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) Rahimbekov called PolOff at 17:32 on April 26 to report four Ministry of Security officers were preventing him from getting on his flight from Dushanbe to Khujand, the capital of Soghd Oblast, where he had planned to conduct political-party training. The normally cheerful and unflappable Rahimbekov said with great distress, "This is very bad. Four guys are all over me. One threatened me, although they will not tell me why." PolOff immediately asked the Embassy expediter, working in another part of the airport, to go to domestic departures and talk with authorities until she arrived. When she arrived at 17:55, the Embassy expediter reported no one was at the gate and the flight had departed. The expediter's contacts - including the Ministry of Security's representative at the airport, "Siroj" - confirmed Rahimbekov had been detained.

13. (C) Initially, it was unclear why he was detained. Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) contacts were unaware of the charges and the situation. After a series of phone calls, senior Ministry of Security officials told SLEA Rahimbekov and a friend allegedly had had sexual relations with two minors in the NDI offices April 25 and paid them 20 somoni (\$7). One girl's uncle had pressed charges with the Ministry of the Interior, and the Ministry of Justice had given the order to detain Rahimbekov.

14. (SBU) After an initial false report that Rahimbekov would be released from custody around 20:00 April 26, SLEA reported the Ministries of Interior and Security had signed a letter to release Rahimbekov the morning of April 27. On April 27, NDI

local staff, including guards and drivers, were called to the Ministry of Security for intense interrogations. A Deputy Minister of Security told SLEA if Rahimbekov agreed to be deported at the first opportunity, the case would be closed and would be kept from the media.

15. (SBU) As the day drew on and Rahimbekov remained in custody, the Ministry of Security reported Rahimbekov had refused to sign a statement and demanded the presence of a U.S. Embassy Official and a "U.S. Lawyer." Ambassador Hoagland spoke with the Kazakhstani Ambassador, who reported Rahimbekov refused the consular services from the Kazakh Embassy. The Ambassador urged the Kazakhstani Ambassador to work with Rahimbekov to get him out of Tajikistan.

16. (SBU) Rahimbekov's wife and father called PolOff several times from Kazakhstan on April 27, asking what the U.S. Embassy could do to help secure his release. She suggested they contact the Kazakhstani Embassy in Dushanbe.

17. (SBU) The Ambassador requested an urgent meeting with Foreign Minister Nazarov or First Deputy Foreign Minister Yatimov, but Nazarov and other officials have been huddled with President Rahmonov all day preparing for his state visit to Kazakhstan, and Yatimov is in Germany.

18. (U) PROVISIONAL PRESS GUIDANCE. Tajik Security Services detained the Acting Director of the National Democratic Institute on April 26 in Dushanbe. The Acting Director is a citizen of Kazakhstan. The U.S. Embassy in Dushanbe is working urgently with the Government of Tajikistan and the Embassy of Kazakhstan to clarify the situation.

19. (C) COMMENT: Whether or not the allegations against Rahimbekov are true, the swift way in which the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Security acted to authorize Rahimbekov's

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detention suggest larger political goals than keeping Dushanbe's citizens safe from vice. We cannot rule out the possibility of a classic Soviet-style entrapment. The Embassy is following the case closely and will continue to work with the MFA, Ministry of Security, and the Kazakhstan Embassy to resolve the situation and ensure that all of Tajikistan's laws are followed, not just those that conveniently catch a controversial NGO head in any sort of act. END COMMENT.
HOAGLAND